The Maharshi

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A VISIT WITH GANAPATI STHAPATI

SRI Ganapati Sthapati, the foremost South Indian temple architect, was recently in the Washington, D. C. area for the consecration ceremonies of one of the many temples he has built for the Hindu community in the USA. James Hartel, a long-standing member of Arunachala Ashrama, went to meet him, accompanied by a few other local devotees. James will be studying temple sculpturing and architecture under Sri Ganapati Sthapati's direction in India from September to January and he came down from his central New York home to meet with him regarding this study program.

Sri Ganapati Sthapati is the son of Vaidyanatha Sthapati, the builder of the Matrubhuteswara Temple and New Hall in Sri Ramanasramam. Vaidyanatha Stapathi also sculpted the life-size granite image of the Maharshi displayed in the New Hall in front of the stone couch, which was also his handiwork.

Though highly learned in the Sastras, especially related to the temple construction, and though a gifted sculptor and temple architect in a long lineage of temple architects, Vaidyanatha Stapathi was barely able to feed his family with the income earned by his profession. The times were not favorable, and his son, Sri Ganapati Sthapati, was naturally discouraged from entering into his hereditary profession. That's where the Maharshi's intercession and grace altered the son's decision and crowned him with unimaginable success. Living for ten years in the proximity of Sri Bhagavan, Sri Ganapathi offers us a few glimpses of the guidance and grace he received during that period in the following interview that took place when James Hartel and friends visited him.

The summer evening was cool. It had just rained a little. The sun escaped from the clouds and lit up the Rajagopuram of the Maha Vishnu Temple near Washington D.C. We were waiting in anticipation to meet an elderly gentleman who is said to have been in the physical presence of Sri Bhagavan. The crimson light falling on the Rajagopuram aptly showcases the work of the man we are about to meet, Ganapati Sthapati. A little while later we meet him in the quarters adjacent to the temple.

When we brought up the notion of interviewing him, he was quick to point out that anything of spiritual worth cannot be formalized in an unnatural fashion. The spirit of what is being discussed can never really be captured in words. It has to be natural. We were asked to write whatever we can remember from memory, later on, and not to tape the interview.

His words on Bhagavan started with a question: "You do know that there can never be anyone like Bhagavan - don't you? Sri Bhagavan is *svayambu* - no external help was necessary for Him to realize the Self. He was a pure soul. It is by Sri Bhagavan's Grace that I am doing what I am doing today. I have seen Sri Bhagavan when I was young. He would call and talk to my father and me. We behaved very casually in His presence. My father was Vaidyanatha Stapathi. It was

not common for Bhagavan to initiate conversations, but He was very free with my father and me. I do not know why. I can only consider myself fortunate.

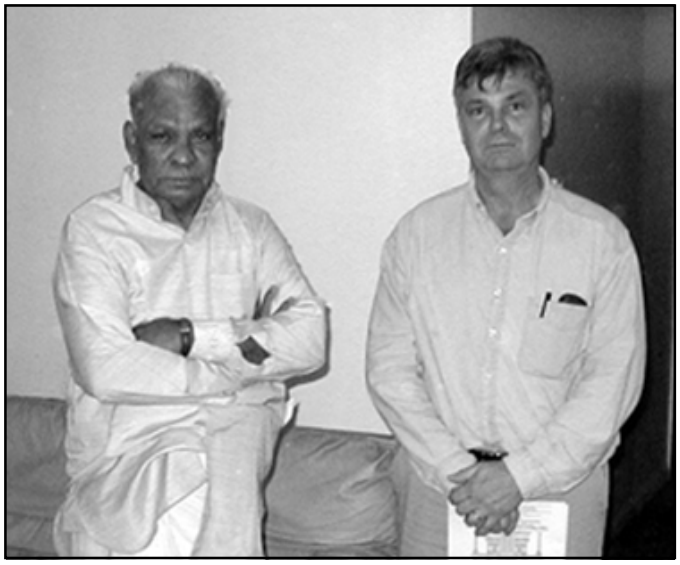
"Once when Bhagavan was reading the newspaper, he announced that I had passed in my SSLC examination. I do not know how he knew and remembered my registration number to be able to recognize it in the results published in the newspaper. A similar thing happened when my intermediate results were published. Bhagavan said, 'It looks like you have passed in first class.'"

On being asked if Bhagavan instructed them during the construction of the temple, he said it was his father's duty to go and report to Bhagavan about the construction progress.

"When deciding which college to go to, there was a consensus that pursuing an engineering degree in Madras would be beneficial. But my father had a meager income of Rs. 100 per month, obtained from building the temple in Sri Ramanasramam. How could we afford my education in a far away place? Bhagavan one day said, 'There is a college that is going to be open locally. Vaidyanatha Stapathi's son can study there.' It turned out that the newspaper reported that a college, Alagappa Chettiar College, was to be opened in Karaikudi. My name appears first in the college registry there. There was no engineering degree then at the campus. In fact, the college was started without any real buildings. If I had gone away to study engineering I would not be doing what I am doing today.

"My father was quite a disciplinarian. He would not eat in Sri Ramanasramam when he was doing work in the temple. He did not want to eat where he was getting paid for the job. But the solicitude with which our family was treated can never be forgotten. Sri Niranjanananda Swami used to send food prepared in the Ashram to our house. The person delivering the food would be asked to remind my mother and us that our father should not come to know that his family was partaking of Ashram food. Despite my father's way of separating work from personal relations, we were treated as part of Bhagavan's family.

"When I go to Sri Ramanasramam I still feel so one with it. There is no part of the Ashram that feels alien from myself; one feels so much at home. People used to come with their bundle of questions about pressing problems to Bhagavan. They may not even get a chance to unbundle their difficulties, but it would all melt away in His presence.



Sri Ganapati Sthapati and James Hartel

"The increase in knowledge and wealth that I have experienced in my life is all due to Bhagavan's Grace. Everything comes from Him. For instance, I have written books about Vastu Sastra. Where did the knowledge come from? I have written another book entitled *Who Created God?* expounding ideas methodically. I did not have the wherewithal to write these things. It is Bhagavan's Love and Grace that has enabled everything. In all these years of work I have had no real sickness. The work does not feel like a burden. It is God's work. Age is a different thing. It is 'time' that creates, sustains and terminates things we see. But the essence of what is done is timeless.

"There is no need for me to say these things, but it does come out in some situations."

There were tears in his eyes as he spoke.

"What is your idea of a pujari at the temple? A pujari should accept what is offered on the plate. He should not ask. He should endure poverty and worldly suffering while maintaining the ideal. In those days when I went with my students to the big temple in Tanjore, the temple priest will be looking forward to

welcoming visitors even from far. You can see him rising from his seat as we approach. He would do the *archana* and *arati* and kindly inquire about our visit. It is the humility with which they conducted themselves that set them apart from the current generation.

"People normally say that they do not want any more births. I say that I should have many births and in every one of them I will be glad to serve as Sthapati.

"When someone asks me who I am, I say that I am one of the aboriginal people of India. Some historians have dated the Vedas to be a few thousand years old. But the Vedas itself states the geography of the region in which it originated to be an island, surrounded by water (*jambudveepe*). This must have been before the land masses became what they are today. The tradition espoused in India is indeed timeless."

When the interview was over, we had been in his company for over an hour. We had our supper before meeting him and we had inadvertently delayed his to 10 p.m. When we expressed our apologies for the delay, he quickly dismissed it and with the remembrance of Sri Bhagavan lingering in the air he ambled over to the dinner table!

As a parting gift, he provided us with copies of his work on Rajagopurams and Vastu Sastra.

"Question Contains the Answer"

By N. Balarama Reddiar

"THE answer is contained in the question itself, for the answer is always the ever-existing Self and the question is only a modulation of it." This remarkable saying of Sri Bhagavan finds an apt illustration in the following instance.

One of our old devotees, the late Sri. A. Bose, lost his only son, a bright boy of twenty. Upset very much by this loss he had a private interview with Bhagavan, which was arranged during His resting time between twelve and two in the afternoon. At one stage in the interview he asked Bhagavan in what appeared a challenging mood, "What is God?". For such a long-standing devotee, the question seemed incongruous!

Bhagavan kept silent for a while and then gently said, "Your question itself contains the answer: What is, (is) God." This illuminating answer was amazingly the question itself!

One should note here that it is not merely a clever or well thought-out answer. That may be so in the case of ordinary men. A Jnani's utterances are free from the intermediary action of the mind, which colors and often distorts the truth. In the case of the seers, it is said 'sense follows speech.' Also, Bhagavan's silence before answering the question was evidently meant to prepare the questioner to receive the full impact of the answer.

"No Mirror Can Ever Shave"

By C. K. Anavema Reddy

THERE is a small piece of conversation from the life of Sri Bhagavan which, as far as I am aware, has not been recorded. Though brief, it has remained very vivid in my memory.

It was in 1940 that one day one of the devotees sitting in the hall raised the topic regarding the utility of reading books on religion and philosophy. In reply Sri Bhagavan said, "You wake up in the morning and look into the mirror and the mirror shows you that you have a growth and that you have to get rid of it. You may go on looking into any number of mirrors; every mirror will tell you the same thing, but no mirror can ever shave you. You have to shave yourself. Instead of wasting time looking into mirror after mirror it is best to start shaving after having looked into the first mirror and known the truth.

"So also all books will tell you the same truth, perhaps in slightly different ways. Instead of wasting time reading book after book why not realize for yourself what was obvious from the very first book."

These words of Sri Bhagavan are pregnant with deep significance and are capable of being elaborately commented upon.

(These two articles, and "Swami Nityananda" on the next page, have been taken from the 1972 issues of the Mountain Path *magazine.*

A Visit with Sri Swami Nityananda

By T. P. Ramachandra Iyer

WHILE staying with devotee-friends in Bombay during a long tour soon after Sri Bhagavan's Maha Nirvana, they took me along with them to visit Sri Swami Nityananda. If I remember right it was sometime in 1950.

On reaching Swami Nityananda's Ashram we found a large gathering of his followers already there. It was not certain whether we would be able to see him as his behavior was rather unpredictable at that time. We told the man in charge that we would take our chance and so sat in a row on the verandah before Swamiji's room. It occurred to us while waiting to recite Sri Bhagavan's "Upadesa Saram" in Sanskrit. As soon as we commenced chanting, we heard a roaring noise inside the room. The door flew open and the huge figure of the Swamiji darted out and sat down to listen to the recital beating time with his hands and approvingly nodding his head. As soon as the chanting was over he roared again and gave us a happy and penetrating look. Seeing the offerings of fruit and sweets brought by my friends he distributed them himself to all present. Then he plunged back into the room and looked at us through the open window graciously.

Sri Swami Nityananda

Again he roared at somebody to give us food, but since we had already eaten we excused ourselves. All of us did obeisance to the Swamiji in front of the window and he nodded in reply and retired. I learned afterwards that Sri Swami Nityananda had great reverence for Sri Bhagavan whose *darshan* he had in earlier days.

We all felt deeply moved by the effect of the recital of the "Upadesa Saram" on the Swamiji which enabled us to have his *darshan* contrary to all expectations. We were greatly impressed and moved by his presence.

106th Anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's *Advent at Arunachala* Celebrated in New York City

You, your family and friends are cordially invited to join us in celebrating the 106th anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's arrival at the holy Arunachala Mountain.

Sunday 8 September 2002

The program will begin at 11:00 a.m.

at the

COMMUNITY CENTER
HINDU TEMPLE SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA (GANESHA TEMPLE)
143-09 HOLLY AVENUE, FLUSHING, QUEENS, NY 11355

Special guest,

SRI V. S. RAMANAN,

PRESIDENT, SRI RAMANASRAMAM, INDIA

will speak on "Surrender". The program will also include recitations, bhajans, puja, followed by prasad (lunch). For more information, call (718) 575-3215

The ***Nova Scotia Ashrama*** will celebrate Bhagavan's Advent on Sunday, Sept. 1 (902) 665-2090

Forty Verses in Praise of Sri Ramana

by Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni

Translated by Dr. Anil K. Sharma

(Continued from the last issue)

The Muni's divine call continues to reverberate, exhorting all to seek refuge at the feet of the Sage Ramana, the manifestation of Lord Skanda and the refuge of the of world. Let us hear his inspired outpouring of devotion:

yatinām-adhipena kuśāgra-lasan
matinā dhṛti-nāśita-citta-buvā|
laharīṁ pramadasya sadā vahatā
nihatāntara śātrava saṁhatinā||8||

yatinām - of ascetics, *adhipena* - lord, *kuśāgra* - sharp (as kusha grass), *lasan* - shining, *matinā* - intelligent, *dhṛti* - firmness, *nāśita* - destroyed, *citta* - ego, *bhuvā* - being, *laharīṁ* - wave, *pramadasya* - of joy, *sadā* - always, *vahatā* - bearing, *nihata* - killed, *antara* - inner, *śātrava* - enemies, *saṁhatinā* - collection, array

He is the Lord of Ascetics. With his sharp and brilliant intellect, he has with firmness destroyed the ego. He is always bearing a wave of joy, and he has killed the array of inner enemies (the six passions).

bhagavatpadam anyajanāsulabham
svaguṇair-adhigatya paraṁ jayatā|
mamatā-rahitena hitena satāṁ
nihitena guṇaprabhuṇā hṛdaye||9||

bhagavatpadam - the feet of the Lord, *anyajana* - other people, *asulabham* - not easily obtained, *svaguṇair* - by his own merits, *adhigatya* - transcending, *paraṁ* - supreme, jayatā - winning, *mamatā* - the feeling of "mine", *rahitena* - free from, *hitena* - friend, *satāṁ* - of the virtuous, *nihitena* - treasured, *guṇaprabhuṇā* - by the Lord of the gunas (Ganapati), *hṛdaye* - at heart

Having transcended all by his own merits, he wins the supreme feet of the Lord, (which are) not easily accessable by others. He is free from the feeling of "mine" and is the friend of the virtuous. He is treasured at heart by the Lord of the gunas, Ganapati.

dharaṇīdhara-jāṅkam-api tyajatā
dharaṇī-tala-vāsi-tamo dhutaye|
nara-veṣa-bhṛtā nagarandhrakṛtā
ramaṇena sanātham-idaṁ bhuvanam||10||

dharaṇīdhara - mountain, *jā* - born from, *aṅkam* - lap, *api* - even, *tyajatā* - giving up, *dharaṇī* - earth, *tala* - surface, *vāsi* - dwells, *tamo* - darkness, *dhutaye* - for removing *nara* - man, *veṣa* - appearance, *bhṛtā* - having, *nagarandhrakṛtā* - mountain-splitter= Lord Skanda, *ramaṇena* - Ramana, *sanātham* - with Lord, *idaṁ* - this, *bhuvanam* - world

Abandoning the lap of his Mother Parvati, he dwells on earth for the removal of darkness. He is Skanda, having the appearance of a man. This world has found a Lord in Ramana!

paradeśineva dhavalena vāsasaḥ
śakalena veṣṭita kaṭī-viśobhinā|
vara-deśikena nara-veṣa-dhārinā
śikhi-vāhanena gurumaj-jagad-bhavet||11||

paradeśin - ascetic, *eva* - only, *dhavalena* - with white, *vāsasaḥ* - cloth, *śakalena* - piece, *veṣṭita* - wrapped, *kaṭī* - buttocks, *viśobhinā* - adorned by, *vara* - best, most excellent, *deśikena* - guru, *nara* - man, *veṣa* - appearance, guise, *dhārinā* - wearing, *śikhi* - peacock, *vāhanena* - with the mount, (Skanda,) *gurumaj* - (has a) Master, *jagad* - world, *bhavet* - is

He is an ascetic, wearing only a white piece of cloth adorning his buttocks. He is the Supreme guru, he is the peacock-mounted Skanda, wearing the guise of a man. In him the world has a Master!

(to be continued)

Letters and Comments

Slow and Difficult

I have read the *MAHARSHI* newsletters on your web site and appreciate all the information found on this site.

I have a personal question. So much has been said about how slow and difficult this practice into Self-enquiry is. Why must this be so if you are a sincere seeker? Sometime ago, you said that the door is always open to Self-realization, but one must bend his head low in order to enter, as the entrance is very low. Again why must this be so? Should this not be something easily accessible if one is searching in earnest? Or is this method not suitable for some.

M. Bose, Canada

In the first stanza of his poem "Atma Vidya," Bhagavan has written: "Self-knowledge is an easy thing,/ The easiest thing there is.", and he goes on to say: "...This path than others is far easier,/ Therefore be still and keep a silent hold/ On tongue and mind and body. That which is,/ The Self-effulgent, will rise within...." Certainly, it is easy for the spiritually mature, but may appear difficult for others. These 'others' will have to persevere perhaps for a whole lifetime.

Directly in proportion to the intensity of your sincerity is Self-enquiry made easy or difficult. "Bending one's head low to enter through the door of Self-realization" means simply that one must become perfectly humble in all things. It is a metaphor for a state of mind in which we become nothing and the Self or God is all. It was said by the Sri Ramana in the course of a conversation.

The Maharshi also said there are two methods: Self-surrender or Self-enquiry. The earnest seeker should adopt that method which seems easiest and natural to his or her temperament. The fact is that those who write to us are experiencing some difficulty in understanding the theory and its application. There are also some who become disheartened because of lack of apparent progress. Our answers are directed toward the particular doubt or problem with the hope that it may encourage the seeker to struggle on, for the ideal of Self-realization is truly the only worthwhile endeavor which gives real meaning to our lives.

Editor

Meet a Living Jnani

I would like to ask you where I could meet a living *Jnani*, whether in India or US. Thank you very much in advance for your answer.

With Love,
Sergei Petrov, Estonia

Yes, you can meet a living Jnani. *It could happen in Russia, USA, India or even right where you are now. How to find the living* Jnani*? Totally dedicate your life to the search for* Jnana *within you. If you do this with one-pointedness and perseverance the* Jnani *or* Jnana *will automatically come to you. Since only a true* Jnani *can know another* Jnani*, there is no other sure way of finding a* Jnani *than this.*

Editor

Losing My Mind

I believe we have emailed one another a few years back... I have a comment/question. I am writing to you as I guessed from your writings that you are 'advanced' with respect to RM's teachings and could perhaps shed light to my 'situation'. My 'problem' is that I have engaged in Self-enquiry for

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a few years now...and am drowning deeper in the silence day by day…slowly but SURELY; disappearing...initially.... I wondered if this would affect my ability to work .... Initially this was not an issue...however...now that even producing a single thought is an unbelievable effort...and I am literally losing my mind...I am barely able to do my job effectively.... I have begun training as a doctor...and considering it is effort to make just one thought... you can guess how I am feeling at the hospital…SO…although *Advaita* says things are happening…I am now looking incompetent regardless...(I used to be intelligent...ha) so I guess my question...if I have one that is...is whether you have encountered this problem and what have you done...? The way I feel now is that it does not look like I will be able to practise medicine...(how can one be a doctor if you can't think??)...any thoughts would be appreciated

An Indian Student Doctor

When Venkataraman experienced full awareness of his immortal Self, completely identifying with It, he was then unable to function in the normal way that a boy of sixteen does in South India. The individuality was swept away by a tidal wave of bliss-awareness and he was henceforth lost in that eternal ocean of Satchitananda. For many years he didn't speak and barely moved about, so absorbed was he.

If you honestly experience that your practice of Self-enquiry has absorbed you into that bliss-awareness to the extent that you feel no inclination to move your mind to obtain anything, by all means drown yourself into that ocean of immortality and freedom. That is the purpose of life. Your prarabdha will dictate the future actions of the body.

On the other hand, if your deep silence does not produce that inexplicable bliss, pure awareness and freedom, be cautious. The disinclination to think and deep quietude may be indications of progress, but only the total loss of individuality can bring about the final experience. We have found that if aspirants renounce all activity before the ground is fully prepared, the planted seeds of spirituality may sprout, grow some, but soon wither for lack of nourishment. So in most cases it is better to spend as much time as possible in the mornings and evenings with one-pointed spiritual practice, perform your daily work as a service in a detached, efficient manner and always keep before your mind's eye the goal shown to us by the Sage of Arunachala, that is, total Self Abidance. In this manner your work will not be a hindrance to your spiritual practice; it will be part of it. And at some point you will wake up and find that the pure-awareness-current is alive and pulsating even in the midst of complicated surgery.

Editor

Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation have been going on in a few places near large cities. Some of them are weekly, others monthly. If you would like to attend any of these and meet followers of Sri Ramana Maharshi in your area, please call or write for more information.

Boston Area — David & Anna Klegon (617-928-1487 /dklegon@rcn.com)

Detroit, Ann Arbor Area — Prashanth & Shobana (734-327-0109 / prashvis@hotmail.com)

Atlanta Area — Mangalam Kalyanam (706-846-5620 / smoothcutter@hotmail.com)

Washington, D.C. Area — Prakash & Mamtha Adiseshan (703-502-4892 / adiseshan@worldnet.att.net)

Miami, Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet Rubinson (954-755-4758 / Arunahill@aol.com)

San Francisco Area — Swaminathan & Sangeeta (510-324-1160 / Nachiketas@hotmail.com)

Toronto, Canada — Krishen & Padma Sastri (905-849-6005 / psastri@hotmail.com)